

to our entire readership and so encourage submissions from all quarters.

Le *Journal de l'histoire du théâtre au Canada* se veut le reflet des deux traditions d'étude de l'histoire de l'activité théâtrale au Canada. L'intention de l'équipe de rédaction est d'encourager les recherches et de faciliter les échanges entre tous les chercheurs qui travaillent dans ce domaine. Nous invitons nos lecteurs à soumettre des articles ou des comptes rendus portant sur le théâtre au Canada, qu'il soit québécois, acadien, manitobain ou d'ailleurs. L'auteur du manuscrit rédigera son texte dans la langue de son choix.

Pour élargir les horizons, nous sommes d'avis qu'il conviendrait de faire paraître des études en français sur un aspect du théâtre canadien anglophone et, inversement, des études en anglais sur l'histoire du théâtre francophone.

Notre *Journal* sera diffusé dans toutes les régions du Canada. Il deviendra certainement un organe indispensable dans la recherche sur l'histoire de l'activité théâtrale. Pour que la revue joue bien son rôle, il faut qu'elle soit bilingue. Nous comptons sur le concours de nos collaborateurs – francophones et anglophones – pour que notre revue devienne dès le début un vrai medium de communication.

Finally, we wish to thank all those who have contributed to making this journal possible. Members of the Canadian Theatre History Research Programme of the University of Toronto provided the original stimulus, which was taken up by the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto, and the Department of Drama, Queen's University in Kingston. We are grateful to both institutions and to the Christine Bissell Fund, University of Toronto, for financial assistance. Members of the Management and Editorial Boards have already provided staunch support, advice and encouragement; invaluable assistance has come from Laurie Lewis and Helen Mah of the Design Unit of the University of Toronto Press; Lynn McFadgen, Shirley Gibson, Andrée McNamara, Laure Rièse, Ronald Bryden, and our editorial assistant Denyse Lynde have been of untold assistance, as have been the many scholars, both Anglophone and Francophone, who have already given generously of time and knowledge to serve as assessors and advisers. We look forward with pleasure to continuing co-operation.

RICHARD PLANT
ANN SADDLEMYER

DAVID GARDNER

DORA MAVOR MOORE (1888-1979)

A tribute delivered 24 May 1979 at the
Conference of the *Association for Canadian
Theatre History / Association d'Histoire du
Théâtre au Canada* held in Saskatoon,
Saskatchewan.

She has been compared to Lilian Baylis, Sybil Thorndike, Queen Victoria, Winston Churchill, and the Oracle. She's been called the mother of theatre in Canada, 'Mother Courage personified', the Canadian Theatre's First Lady, its *Gran' Dame*, its doyenne. June Callwood has marvelled at her 'ferocious heart', while Lister Sinclair dubbed her 'a gentle, genial steamroller'.

It is fitting, tonight, that Dora Mavor Moore be elected to Honorary Membership in the *Association for Canadian Theatre History / Association d'Histoire du Théâtre au Canada*, for she embraces the entire history of our twentieth century.

Born in Glasgow, 8 April 1888, Dora Mavor came to Canada at the age of four, when her famous father, Professor James Mavor, became the newly appointed head of Political Economy, at the University of Toronto. Intimidated, she has told us, by his academic prowess, and shunted between eighteen different schools in Canada and abroad, Dora failed her university year, twice in a row, in the period between 1906-09. But she had played Rosalind at university, with the University Women's Club, and through the speaking of Shakespeare, she found herself.

Abandoning her university arts degree, she enrolled in the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression, 1909-11. There, the studies of speech and elocution prepared her for a scholarship to RADA, and she became the first Canadian student ever to be accepted at London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

Graduating in 1912, she entered the profession, making her debut in Ottawa with the Colonial Stock Company. Then she ran off to New York to audition for Ben Greet. 'B.G.', as she called him, had been brought to the university by her father, and it was his outdoor production of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, on the site of Convocation Hall, that had made a vivid, early theatre impression.

Dora was particularly taken with the performance of *Hermia*, by an eighteen-year-old named Sybil Thorndike.

In New York, Ben Greet presumed that Dora wanted to play *Juliet*. To which Dora replied, 'No'. She wanted to teach, 'and you have to know how to act in order to do that'. She'd 'be happy with small parts'. Although her father asked that she be sent home, she stayed, and with \$10.00 from her mother, and careful chaperoning, Dora Mavor joined the Ben Greet Pastoral Players on their Chautauqua Circuit tours around New York. She played tall comedienne roles like *Viola*, *Rosalind*, and *Kate Hardcastle* in *She Stoops to Conquer*, but never *Juliet*. The apprenticeship was completed with eight roles on Broadway, and even a bit in the 1914 silent film version of *Anna Karenina*. In the same year, just when her acting career seemed to be taking off, she heard Laurence Irving address a Canadian commencement exercise, and once more she was converted to teaching. Irving had spoken of the natural inclination of the child to act, and perhaps touching a responsive chord, had postulated that the child's desire (especially the child of a famous father), sprang from a 'divine gift of dissatisfaction'.

Dora had returned to Toronto, and in 1915 she married Francis Moore, an Army Chaplain. In 1916, as a volunteer working with the underprivileged children of the Central Neighbourhood House in Toronto's Cabbagetown district, Dora directed Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*, launching a new career which was to be spent in the service of the theatre. Later in the year, she accompanied her husband overseas.

However, she was destined to act again. Ben Greet needed her to replace Beerhohm Tree's daughter as *Viola* in *Twelfth Night*, and so in 1918, Dora became the first Canadian to play the Old Vic Theatre.

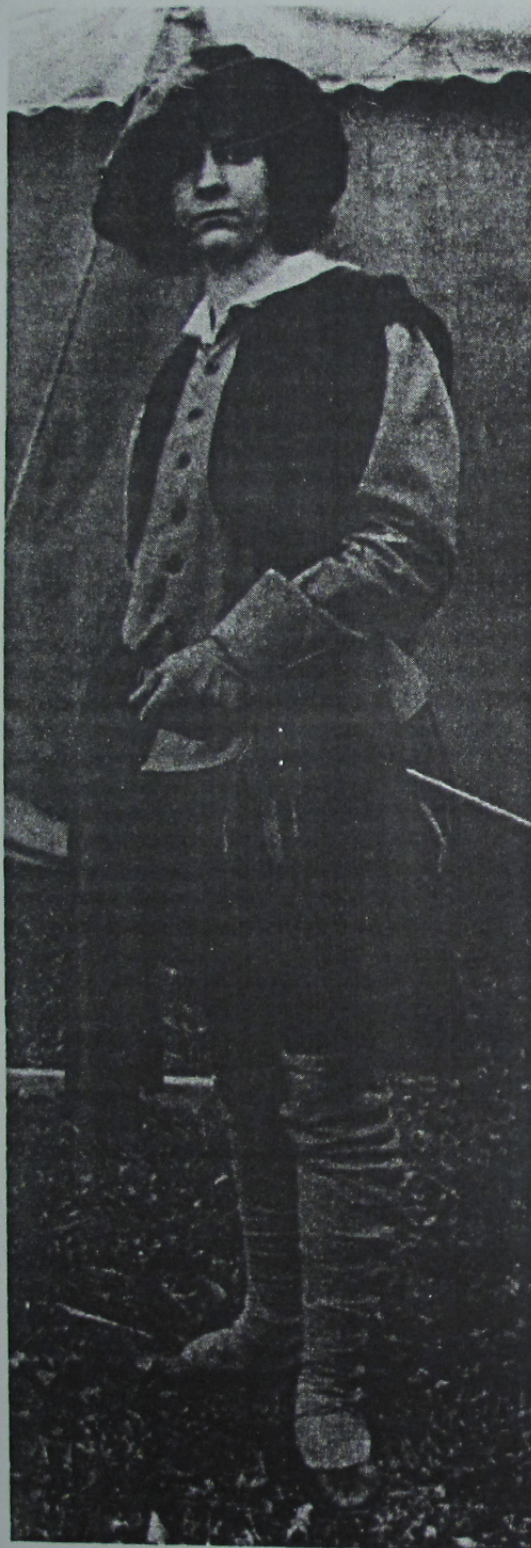
She bore three sons: Francis, James Mavor, and Peter, back in Canada after the war. During the 1920s and 30s she lectured and directed a variety of churches and schools, including Margaret Eaton and the University of Toronto's Department of Extension. With the separation from her husband in 1928, the onus of raising her three boys fell directly on her shoulders. In 1929 she produced and directed a mammoth historical pageant at Massey Hall, with a cast of 500, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Anglican Church in Canada. Then she got back to Shakespeare in 1930, directing the Hart House Touring Players for Herman Voaden, and in 1932 playing *Juliet's* mother in Wilson Knight's production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Between 1938 and 1941 Mrs Moore had her own company, the Village Players, again touring Shakespeare to schools, under the aegis of the Board of Education. The company had been started when some collegiate students came to Mrs Moore and asked her if she could coach them in Shakespeare. In the 1931 to 1951 period (before Stratford), she mounted twenty-two Shakespearean productions, essentially employing the techniques she had acquired from Ben Greet.

In 1941 the Village Players moved into a barn adjoining the 1840s farmhouse



Dora Mavor Moore 1946

Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto



Dora Mavor Moore in *Romance*
1st Broadway performance 1913



Dora Mavor Moore as Viola

Mrs Moore had bought in 1938 from Merrill Denison's mother. Seating eighty (if people perched in the rafters), the Barn became the focal summer home of the Village Players. It was an early example of summer stock, but summer stock with a difference. The audiences saw Brecht, Lorca, the first Tennessee Williams in Canada, Priestley and Saroyan, as well as a new play by John Coulter, and a bill of one-acts by Lister Sinclair, Vincent Tovell, and Alan King (of radio fame). New writers, new artists were being introduced and promoted, as her father had done before her. The Village Players was the prototype, of course, for the New Play Society. John Holden's Actors' Colony Theatre had been the first native professional company in the Toronto area, but Dora's would be the first to include indigenous work.

The New Play Society was a dream that had lain dormant since 1937, when Dora had spent a weekend at William Butler Yeats' home in Ireland. Yeats had been a guest of her father's at the University of Toronto. In Dublin he took Dora to see the Abbey Theatre. Why couldn't we have a *Canadian* theatre in the same way that they had an *Irish* one, she asked? The Village Players took a vote, and turned professional.

The initial financing of \$2,000.00 for the New Play Society came from war bonds her three sons had sent home from overseas. She purchased a simple lighting system, a ground cloth and a curtain, and rented the Museum Theatre, opening, appropriately, on 5 October 1946, with an Irish play, J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. In 1947 *Lady Precious Stream* was produced, in Chinese, and Montreal's *Les Compagnons* were invited to bring two Molière farces, in French. New Canadian plays took their place beside the classics of every nation. In total, during ten seasons, the NPS produced seventy-two plays and forty-seven of them were originals, cajoled out of Canadian novelists like Morley Callaghan and Mazo de la Roche, or from the stable of new playwrights Andrew Allan was assembling for his CBC *Stage Series*.

When an adaptation of Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* failed to materialize in the spring of 1948, a now-legendary musical revue was hastily slapped together. Andrew Allan suggested its name, *Spring Thaw*, and for nearly twenty-five years it blissfully satirized the Canadian scene. Who can forget Jane Mallett in hiking attire, heralding the arrival of spring with gentle double entendre: 'Hello! I've just had my first tramp in the woods today'. Mrs Moore is said never to have completely approved of *Spring Thaw*, perhaps because it detracted from the Society's serious and experimental fare. But in those non-subsidized times, it paid the bills.

There were notable Museum Theatre productions: O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* and Coulter's *Riel* come to mind, as well as several ambitious forays into the Royal Alexandra: Morley Callaghan's *To Tell the Truth*, Mavor Moore's musical version of Leacock's *Sunshine Town*, and pantomimes like *Mother Goose* and *Babes in the Wood* and *Bold Robin Hood*. I played Littlejohn to Giselle Mackenzie's Robin

Hood, and still prize a photograph signed, 'See you in the Woods, Giselle'. Not all the productions were good. Many were under-rehearsed and indifferently directed. Especially in the Museum-space, the visual standards often betrayed the shoestring nature of the venture, and the 'plank and a passion' philosophy Dora retained from the Chautauqua circuit.

Television in 1952 took Mavor away, and then Stratford in 1953 siphoned off interest, as well as administrative and acting personnel. Ironically, Mrs Moore had helped create the Shakespearean Festival.

Mrs Moore first met Tyrone Guthrie in June of 1931, at a tea-party given in Toronto by Merrill Denison. Tony had just finished directing *The Romance of Canada* series for the CNR radio network, scripted by Denison. They talked about Dora's cousin, James Bridie, and about Tony's infatuation with Canada. 'If I was ever asked to put on a Shakespeare play I would like to do it with a cast of Canadians', said the thirty-one-year-old Guthrie. 'I like the way they speak.'

Although they never communicated in the interval, Dora never forgot those words, and when Tom Patterson failed in his explorations with Laurence Olivier to head the project, it was Mrs Moore who suggested Tyrone Guthrie instead, and made the initial overtures. She also loaned the NPS studio at 782 Yonge Street (at Bloor) for auditions and costume-making. She once raised money, anonymously, from the J. Arthur Rank organization, when a particular crisis threatened Stratford's opening. Tony had said he wanted Canadian speech at Stratford, and Dora told me she even arranged one night for Alec Guinness to slip into a performance of *Spring Thaw*, so that he might do some homework.

By 1954, with the exception of *Spring Thaw*, the NPS was in trouble. By 1957 production had ceased, and the spotlight shifted to the New Play Society School that Mrs Moore had launched in 1950. At its height there were 200 students. At its lowest ebb in 1960, when the Society lost its first studio space, there were only a handful of children meeting privately in her home. Some of the most interesting work of the School was therapeutic – drama training for the hard-of-hearing, and special classes and productions for the patients of the Ontario Mental Health Hospital at Whitby. In 1958 Mrs Moore arranged for two Mexican students to come to Canada to study with her, and sponsored a Mexican theatre evening.

The School closed in 1968, and in 1971 the New Play Society was dissolved as a legal entity, proudly declaring itself debt-free. There had been some attempts at a 'last hurrah': hopes for a Centennial production of *The Three Estates*, to be directed by Tony Guthrie, for example, and the dream of a National Youth Theatre. But they came to nought. However, in 1965, there was one glorious occasion when ten original Canadian plays were produced, running for twenty performances, with two casts for each play. It was a marathon feat, a fore-runner of Ken Gass's all-night festivals at Factory Lab in the 1970s. Mrs Moore was seventy-seven at the time.

Three years ago, I met with Mrs Moore to talk about her career and Tyrone Guthrie. She was still vitally concerned, at the age of eighty-eight, railing against the town of Stratford during the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Festival for its rampant commercialism, and bitterly protesting the capricious conceit of Robin Phillips for making alterations to Tony's concept of the Stratford stage.

Historically, Dora's place is secure: the first Canadian student at RADA; the first to act with the Old Vic; the founder of the New Play society; the catalyst for hiring Tyrone Guthrie at Stratford; the producer of forty-seven original Canadian plays and *Spring Thaw*.

In the larger context she will be seen as one of a rainbow of remarkable teacher-directors who appeared, miraculously, about the same time across Canada. In their various regions they accomplished the bridging over between the Little Theatre movement and the postwar, professional theatre. In honouring Dora Mavor Moore, we cannot help but remember all the others from coast to coast: Yvonne Firkins, Dorothy Somerset and Sidney Risk in British Columbia; Elizabeth Sterling Haynes and Betty Mitchell in Alberta; Mary Ellen Burgess, Florence James and Frank Holroyd in Saskatchewan; George Broderson, Nancy Pyper, Arthur and Pauline Boutal in Manitoba; Dora Mavor Moore, Josephine Barrington, Dorothy Goulding, Clara Salisbury Baker, and Robert Gill in Toronto; William Angus in Kingston; Father Emile Legault, Georges Groulx, Filmore Sadler, Eleanor Stuart in Montreal; Harold Sipperall and Donald Wetmore in Halifax, among many that I am sure I have forgotten.

There were two phrases that Mrs Moore was fond of saying, and they seem to reflect her own deepest nature and philosophy. To her, 'The greatest souls are the simplest'. She applied it to Tyrone Guthrie, and somehow, in her own long and highly pressured career she, too, managed to preserve the purity and shining integrity of the young at heart. It is perhaps how she maintained her uncommon rapport with children.

And again, on a CBC *Project 65* broadcast, I remember hearing her say, 'Life is greater than art. We use art to perfect our life'. Today, ten days after her death, when her magnificent ninety-one years of life are over (seventy of them spent in the theatre of Canada), we fondly remember both the life and the art. To the living, life is, of course, most important; but after death it is surprising how one's art lives on, even in that most ephemeral of the arts, the theatre.

I know you join with me in lovingly celebrating the life and achievements of this great Canadian, Dora Mavor Moore.

NOTE: Dora Mavor Moore died at approximately 5:00 pm on Tuesday, 15th May, 1979, while this tribute was in preparation.



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